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56th plenary meeting
Wednesday, 5 November 2003, 10 a.m.
New York

President: The Hon. Julian R. Hunte ..... (Saint Lucia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 160 (*continued*)

Global road safety crisis

Draft resolution (A/58/L.3/Rev.1)

The President: Members will recall that the Assembly held the debate on this agenda item at its 41st and 42nd plenary meetings, on 21 and 22 October 2003.

We shall now proceed to consider draft resolution A/58/L.3/Rev.1. I give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat.

Ms. Kelley (Department for General Assembly and Conference Management): I should like to inform Member States that, under the terms of operative paragraph 4 of draft resolution A/58/L.3/Rev.1, the General Assembly would request the Department of Public Information to organize a meeting of experts, the private sector, relevant non-governmental organizations, members of civil society and other interested parties, including the media, on the morning of 15 April 2004, in conjunction with the plenary meeting, to raise awareness and exchange information on best road practices.

Advice was provided to the Secretariat by the sponsor of operative paragraph 4 that the content of the paragraph would be provided within the framework of the weekly non-governmental organization briefings that the Department of Public Information organizes routinely on Thursday mornings. On the basis of that clarification, no additional appropriations would be required in the biennium 2004-2005 as a result of the adoption of draft resolution A/58/L.3/Rev.1.

The President: The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/58/L.3/Rev.1. Before going further, I should like to announce that since the publication of the draft resolution, the following country has become a sponsor of A/58/L.3/Rev.1: Viet Nam.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/58/L.3/Rev.1?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution 58/9).

The President: The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 160.

Agenda item 27

Zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic

Report of the Secretary-General (A/58/265)

Draft resolution (A/58/L.12)

Mr. Cappagli (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I am honoured to introduce draft resolution A/58/L.12 on behalf of the African and Latin American member

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States of the Zone of Peace and Cooperation of the South Atlantic, which are the following: Benin, Brazil, Cape Verde, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Namibia, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, Uruguay and Argentina, and now Angola has joined.

Eighteen years ago, the countries of the South Atlantic decided to create an innovative mechanism for ongoing consultations on issues of mutual interest and to develop closer, more active and dynamic relations. To that end, we established the Zone of Peace and Cooperation of the South Atlantic, which is the sole interregional forum of its kind, grouping together States of South America and Africa.

Since the establishment of the Zone, we have been able to make tangible progress towards the achievement of the objectives set forth in 1985, having developed in particular mechanisms to cooperate in the fields of economic and social development, environmental protection, preservation of marine living resources and the maintenance of peace throughout the region.

While reaffirming the importance of the Zone as a basis for the development of cooperation among the countries that share the South Atlantic, Argentina also believes that it is necessary to renew and strengthen the content of that cooperation. My country firmly believes that the objectives of peace and cooperation for which the Zone was established will be attained only when the institutions of representative democracy are fully operative and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms is attained in the member countries of the Zone.

In 1998, Argentina assumed coordination of the Standing Committee of the Zone in its capacity as host of the most recent conference and in view of its special interest in strengthening peace and security and promoting a cooperative relationship among the States of the South Atlantic. My country has proposed a series of actions and initiatives with the aim of making progress in the various areas set forth in the Final Declaration and the Plan of Action adopted at the fifth ministerial meeting of the Zone, held in Buenos Aires in October 1998.

With this in mind, we pointed out, inter alia, the potential of holding political consultations among the States members on issues of mutual interest addressed by the United Nations, and we proposed that the Zone be transformed into a valuable forum for support and promotion of democracy in our respective regions.

Taking into account that one of the objectives of the Zone is the peaceful and negotiated solution of existing disputes, we call on all States, both members and non-members of the Zone, to pledge to peacefully, justly and definitively solve all disputes in the South Atlantic, in accordance with the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations and the relevant resolutions of this Organization.

In this connection, it is worth recalling that when the General Assembly established the Zone of Peace and Cooperation of the South Atlantic, it called on all States to cooperate in the elimination of all sources of tension, to respect the national unity, sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity of every State of the South Atlantic and to strictly observe the principle that the acquisition of territories by force is inadmissible.

I would not like to conclude without expressing our appreciation for the generous offer of Benin to host the sixth high-level meeting of the States members of the Zone of Peace and Cooperation of the South Atlantic. We hope that it will be possible to hold that meeting sometime in 2004 and strengthen even further the relations of friendship and cooperation among the 24 countries of Latin America and Africa that are members of that forum.

To conclude, I would like to request all delegations present in this Hall to bear in mind the noble goals of the Zone of Peace and Cooperation of the South Atlantic and to extend their support to draft resolution A/58/L.12.

Mr. Adekanye (Nigeria): The initiative taken in 1986 by the 24 member States from the two shores of the South Atlantic to create the Zone of Peace and Cooperation of the South Atlantic and approved by the General Assembly in its resolution 41/11 of 27 October 1986 remains a landmark achievement in the sphere of multilateral efforts to promote regional peace, international security and cooperation. It established a valuable framework for cooperation whose objectives, including the complete denuclearization of the region, protection of the marine environment, promotion of economic cooperation, trade and investment and the fight against drug trafficking remain valid today.

As an earnest indication of Nigeria's commitment to the pursuit of these objectives, we, in 2001, ratified or acceded to the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty — the Treaty of Pelindaba — the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the Ottawa Convention on landmines. Similarly, in consultation with concerned member States of the Zone, Nigeria is actively seeking the required number of ratifications for the entry into force of the Treaty of Pelindaba. A draft resolution to that effect is being presented at the current session of the General Assembly. When adopted, the draft resolution will enhance the shared objectives of the Zone.

The delegation of Nigeria is equally gratified to note that, Cuba's ratification last year of the NPT and the Treaty of Tlatelolco, all member States of the Zone are now irrevocably committed to a nuclear-weapon-free South Atlantic.

Nigeria remains concerned with the continued incidence of transboundary movement of wastes and transportation of radioactive materials that could constitute a threat to marine life of coastal States and the ecosystem of the entire region. We reiterate Nigeria's commitment to the Bamako Convention on the Ban on the Import into Africa and the Control of Transboundary Movement and Management of Hazardous Wastes within Africa. We also support the International Atomic Energy Agency's Code of Practice on the International Transboundary Movement of Radioactive Waste, aimed at protecting all States from the dumping of radioactive wastes on their territories.

The latest challenge to the peace and security of the Zone is the illicit circulation of small arms and light weapons. It has fuelled conflicts and hampered peace, security and development of some of the countries of the Zone. The active participation of member States of the Zone in the 2001 United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, as well as the first Biennial Meeting of States to Consider the Implementation of the 2001 Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects, which took place in New York last July, is indicative of our desire to confront the problem. We call on the international community to give support to this desire through implementation of the Programme of Action agreed to at that Conference.

Last year, the Assembly adopted a resolution of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) as the main platform of Africa's development. This decision, in our view, strengthens international support for Africa. The faithful implementation of NEPAD objectives will therefore reinvigorate cooperation in our Zone.

Out of the conviction that corruption constitutes one of the biggest obstacles to development, Nigeria placed the issue of an international legally binding instrument to control corruption on the global agenda in 1999. For us, tracing and repatriating funds of illicit origin to their countries of origin was of crucial importance. Happily, this Assembly last Friday adopted a resolution approving the draft United Nations Convention to Combat Corruption. Undoubtedly, this important decision will further accelerate cooperation in our Zone. We therefore urge all States in the Zone, indeed all Member States of this Organization, to subscribe to this Treaty at the High-level Political Signing Conference, scheduled to be held in Mérida, Mexico, next month, as well as to initiate the process for its early ratification.

Finally, the Nigerian delegation expresses its concern over the increase in drug trafficking and related crimes. We call on the international community and members of the Zone to promote regional and international cooperation to combat all aspects of the problem of drugs and related offences.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/58/L.12. May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/58/L.12?

Draft resolution A/58/L.12 was adopted (resolution 58/10).

The President: I thank everyone for the excellent cooperation on this particular matter. May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 27?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 32

Question of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas)

The President: I should like to inform representatives that, following consultations regarding agenda item 32, on the question of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas), and taking into account General Assembly decision 57/511 of 11 November 2002, it is proposed that the General Assembly decide to postpone consideration of this item and to include it in the provisional agenda of its fifty-ninth session.

May I take it that the Assembly, taking into account decision 57/511, wishes to defer consideration of this item and to include it on the provisional agenda of the fifty-ninth session?

It is so decided.

The General Assembly has thus concluded its consideration of agenda item 32.

Agenda item 22

Assistance in mine action

Report of the Secretary-General (A/58/260 and Add.1)

Mr. Mantovani (Italy): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. The acceding countries Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, the associated countries Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey, and the European Free Trade Association country member of the European Economic Area Iceland align themselves with this statement.

At the outset, allow me to pay tribute to the courage of de-miners and of all those involved in mine action, whose dedication to the cause of a world free from anti-personnel landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) often exposes them to the most serious dangers. I would also like to commend efforts by the affected communities themselves, the Standing Committees and States parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, the United Nations Mine Action Services and all relevant United Nations agencies, the Mine Action Support Group, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines and its many affiliated non-governmental organizations, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining and all other institutions and organizations committed to the common goal of reducing human suffering and increasing human security.

We cannot ignore that the unwavering endeavour aimed at eradicating anti-personnel landmines and UXOs worldwide is still required. Reliable figures indicate that in 2001-2002 landmine casualties were reported in 70 countries around the world. The total number of new victims is estimated at between 15,000 and 20,000 per year. It is appalling that approximately 70 per cent of reported casualties were civilians, especially women and children, often well after the end of armed conflicts. Furthermore, anti-personnel mines and UXOs have severe economic and social consequences. The mutilation of victims places a heavy burden on afflicted countries already struggling to rebuild their societies and overcome severe financial constraints. Moreover, situations in which refugees are prevented from returning to their homes because of anti-personnel mines pose a recurrent challenge. Post-conflict reconstruction, economic recovery, social rehabilitation and development are thereby seriously hampered.

That is why support for international mine action ranks today among the political priorities of the European Union. The European Union was among the first to condemn the indiscriminate character of anti-personnel landmines, and to recognize the unbearable suffering they impose on civilian populations and to take concrete action to alleviate it.

While the primary responsibility for the problem of landmines and unexploded ordnance in affected countries lies with national authorities, the acquisition of the institutional and technical means needed to tackle it is often hindered by lack of financial resources. The United Nations can contribute to addressing such challenges through an integrated approach based on humanitarian assistance and development strategies.

I would like to commend the Secretary-General for his report on assistance in mine action (A/58/260), which represents an important step towards streamlining and enhancing international coordination in this field. The European Union welcomes the

progress indicated in the report and notes with great interest its conclusions and recommendations. The results achieved in the implementation of the six strategic goals of the 2001-2005 United Nations mine-action strategy are particularly important. Among them, it is worth mentioning the increased data provided through the electronic mine information network; the ongoing support for relevant research and development activities; the testing in Iraq of the United Nations operational framework for rapid response; the development of a common format for gathering emergency assessment data on mine and unexploded ordnance hazards; the ongoing efforts to build national and local mine-action capacities in over 30 countries; the drafting of initial guidelines for transition strategies for United Nations-supported mine-action programmes at the national and local levels; the agreement to develop guidelines for the integration of a gender perspective into mine-action programmes; and strengthened management and oversight of the International Mine Action Standards.

It is encouraging to note that the international community agrees on a set of basic principles underpinning mine-action programmes, including the need to promote the further involvement of mine-affected communities when determining mine-action priorities and to integrate mine action into humanitarian and development planning and operations.

The European Union agrees that mine action must be an integral part of the consolidated appeals process and welcomes the inclusion of mine-action requirements in peacekeeping mission planning and structures, as appropriate.

Although the Secretary-General's report indicates that progress has been achieved, it also points out that further work needs to be done. In that respect, it is important that the United Nations mine-action strategy for the period 2005-2009 be elaborated in 2005.

The European Union is convinced that a precondition for effective mine action is a comprehensive and balanced approach combining mine clearance, stockpile destruction, victim assistance, capacity-building and mine-risk education. An adequate level of funding for international mine action ought to be maintained over the coming years, especially in those areas, such as victim assistance, that represent a long-term concern for affected countries. In that respect, sustainability and local ownership of humanitarian mine action should be promoted.

Enhanced cooperation among donor and recipient countries remains a key factor for the success of international mine-action activities. In this context, I wish to commend the United Nations Mine Action Service, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines for the coordinating role they are playing.

The European Union is firmly convinced that the appalling impact of landmines and unexploded ordnance on civilian populations needs to be dealt with through an undiminished level of financial support for mine action and through a consistent political commitment to the universalization and full implementation of the relevant multilateral framework of humanitarian law.

As far as the first aspect is concerned, the unwavering commitment of the European Union is shown by its ongoing financial assistance for international mine action. In 2002, overall European Union funding — earmarked for mine action by member States and the European Community (EC) — amounted to 145 million euros.

In a broader perspective, it is worth recalling that the European Community pledged 240 million euros for the period 2002-2009, matching the standards of major donor countries. Following two ad hoc regulations adopted in 2001, the EC Mine Action Strategy and multi-annual programming for 2002-2004, endorsed last year, represent the appropriate mid-term operational framework to coordinate and prioritize European-financed projects in this specific field. As already indicated, this effort is complemented by national funding by European Union member States. In particular, by focusing on five mutually reinforcing components — advocacy to stigmatize the use of anti-personnel landmines and support for their total ban; mine-risk education; mine clearance; victim assistance; and stockpile destruction — the EC Mine Action Strategy is fully consistent with the United Nations mine-action strategy.

I wish to reaffirm that the European Union will prioritize its financial aid towards those countries that adhere to the principles and obligations of the Mine Ban Convention. Membership of the Mine Ban Convention and strict compliance with all its

provisions remain crucial element in directing relevant European Union funding. However, the European Union may also consider providing financial support to States not party to the Mine Ban Convention, should humanitarian emergencies arise. As in the past, that support will be contingent upon proven political will by the recipient country to move towards accession to the Convention.

The European Union will spare no effort to promote the universal and full implementation of the Mine Ban Convention. As of today, 141 States have ratified or acceded to the Convention, and an additional 9 States have signed but not yet ratified.

In the framework of the Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May be Deemed to be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects, the European Union will continue to support the adoption of legally binding instruments on explosive remnants of war and on mines other than anti-personnel mines.

The negative humanitarian impact of landmines on the social and economic fabric of several countries worldwide has been substantially reduced over recent years. Nonetheless, the ongoing widespread suffering of many innocent people clearly shows that we have no reason to be fully satisfied. Therefore, the European Union — which remains in the forefront of assistance for mine action — is ready to join its efforts with those of the rest of the international community in the common endeavour to free the world from the scourge of anti-personnel landmines and unexploded ordnance and of their indiscriminate effects.

Mr. Duclos (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): In recent years, we have noted with satisfaction the development of a true international political will to eradicate anti-personnel landmines — damaging, insidious and indiscriminate weapons whose use has ethical dimensions both for States and for civil society as a whole. The resulting effort, imagination and political commitment that has propelled the issue of anti-personnel landmines to the top of the multilateral agenda is an acknowledgement of the fact that the existence of these weapons represents an ongoing violation of humanitarian law and that their use flies in the face of the principles and norms of human rights.

Peru, which has been and remains a stalwart standard-bearer in the cause of prohibiting anti-personnel landmines, welcomes the report contained in A/58/260, which provides an overview of the strategies of the Organization on this issue. The report informs us on the efforts made this past year aimed at increasing information on problems stemming from mine-related activities, strengthening the capacity for action of States, implementing international norms and seeking increased available resources, among other things. My country shares that vision and aspires to continue to consider it a political priority, not only at the national level, but also at the regional level.

In August this year, the regional seminar entitled "Toward a hemisphere free of anti-personnel landmines" was held in Lima under the sponsorship of the Governments of Peru and Canada and the Organization of American States. That meeting provided a valuable opportunity achieve an overall balance in anti-personnel mine action in the Americas and in the goals envisaged for the region in 2004.

The meeting adopted a Lima Declaration, "Toward a hemisphere free of anti-personnel landmines", which reaffirms the need to fulfil the goals of worldwide elimination of landmines and encourages the political impetus and the resources necessary to maintain regional leadership in that regard.

Those results, including the working groups' conclusions on items such as awareness-raising on and assistance to victims in the region, were presented at the fifth Review Conference of States Parties to the Ottawa Convention, held in Bangkok, Thailand, last September.

Anti-personnel landmines as weapons of destruction have been used in almost all inter-State wars or internal conflicts and have claimed thousands of lives in recent years. Peru, not having been spared from this scourge, has acted on its commitment to the objectives and purposes of international instruments, which have been a part of the progress it has made in the past year in areas such as the following: humanitarian mine clearance activity along its northern border, together with mine clearance personnel from Ecuador; and mine clearance around high-tension electricity towers in the interior of the country, resulting in the removal of more than 36,548 mines from 953 towers. At the same time, innovative projects are being carried out to use technology in humanitarian mine clearance activities.

Other activities include implementation of a parallel task of education on the dangers of mines, including training, awareness-raising, evaluation and monitoring. The educational programme on the dangers of anti-personnel mines — Sierra Central 2003 — has been carried out in more than 50 communities of various departments of Peru. The Government has also established a Peruvian anti-personnel mine action centre, CONTRAMINAS, which is responsible for proposing State policy on anti-personnel mines.

In the legal area, which is another strategic objective of the United Nations, Peru has drafted a penal code that prohibits action that contravenes the spirit of the Ottawa Convention. It has also joined the campaign of the International Committee of the Red Cross and other concerned States, aimed at adopting legislative measures by States parties to the Ottawa Convention.

Peru understands that all strategic action against anti-personnel mines places the individual at its core, making it essential to offer the individual comprehensive assistance that includes measures of prevention, physical and psychological rehabilitation and economic and social reintegration. My country is designing strategies in this area, which will require greater financial and technical assistance from friendly States and international organizations to enable it to deal with this vital aspect of the issue of anti-personnel mines.

My country hopes to continue to make progress towards achieving the ultimate objective of the full elimination of anti-personnel landmines, through a new form of global coexistence based on the acknowledgement of shared larger interests. That is all the more urgent since these weapons continue to be the direct source of death, mutilation and threats to the lives of thousands of innocent civilians.

Mr. Løvald (Norway): Anti-personnel landmines remain a serious cause of human suffering in many parts of the world. Since the entry into force of the Mine Ban Convention four and a half years ago, much has been achieved to relieve this suffering, but much still remains to be done.

Norway believes that, in order to properly address the problems caused by anti-personnel mines, the following principles are important. Sensible resource utilization requires that States be committed to the obligations of the Mine Ban Convention. National ownership of mine action and mine victim assistance is crucial. Mine-affected countries must assess their own needs and define their own priorities. Sharing of knowledge and experience among mine-affected countries constitutes a resource in itself and should be further enhanced.

To make better use of resources, mine action needs to be coordinated at the country level. Cooperation between national and local authorities, field operators and donors should be enhanced. In order to make mine action sustainable and effective, the primary responsibility needs to be with the mine-affected countries themselves.

Mine action should be further integrated into the broader development agenda. In mine-affected areas, mine action must be an integral part of efforts towards poverty reduction and sustainable development.

For Norway, the Mine Ban Convention is the primary framework for mine action. The Convention contains provisions not only for a total ban on anti-personnel mines, but also on international cooperation and assistance in mine action. The intersessional work programme of the Convention constitutes an important arena for discussions related to mine action. Within that framework, Norway is coordinating the work of a Resource Mobilization Contact Group, which aims at promoting adequate funding for mine action and, in particular, the best possible utilization of resources available for mine action. These discussions take place between all actors involved — mine-affected States, other States, the International Committee of the Red Cross, various non-governmental organizations and operators in the field, as well as regional organizations and, of course, the United Nations system.

Clearly, the United Nations has a role to play in mine action. The implementing agencies of the United Nations should continue to include mine action in their regular activities when that is relevant. For example, both the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund have demonstrated that that is possible when relevant mine action should be part of the United Nations consolidated appeals and UNDP needs assessments. In that respect, the most important task of United Nations Mine Action Service is to support the necessary coordination within the United Nations system and to ensure that mine action is part of United Nations discussions and strategies where relevant.

The best possible utilization of resources available for mine action can only be achieved if efforts are properly coordinated at the field level. This is why we attach crucial importance to national ownership of mine action programmes.

Ms. Knowles (Australia): As a strong supporter of the Mine Ban Treaty, Australia is pleased to note the recent accession of Belarus, Serbia and Montenegro, Timor-Leste and Turkey to the Treaty, and ratification by Burundi, Ghana, Greece, Lithuania and Sudan. We welcome the significant show of support for the Mine Ban Treaty and its goals, and we look forward to the strong involvement of these countries in mine action issues in the future.

Universalization of the Convention is a primary goal for the Australian Government. We will continue to work closely with other States parties to encourage States not parties to the Convention to take steps towards accession.

Australia recognizes that many non-signatory countries have practical resource pressures and competing priorities. In that regard, we are pleased to note in the Landmine Monitor report that donor funding towards mine action has increased by more than 30 per cent in the past year. We must all continue to look for ways to provide support to those countries that wish to become party to the Convention.

We welcome the good progress that has been made in stockpile destruction in the past year, with 18 countries reporting the completion of the destruction of their stockpiles of anti-personnel landmines. The diminishing stockpiles are concrete steps towards reducing the potential use of mines in times of conflict and unrest.

With A$88 million expended on mine action activities since January 1996, the Australian Government expects to fully meet its pledge of A$100 million for mine action activities by December 2005. Australia's mine action assistance has focused on building indigenous capacity for mine clearance, assisting landmine victims and promoting mine awareness.

Consistent with the overall priorities of Australia's aid programme, the majority of Australia's humanitarian mine clearance activity is focused on countries in our region, many of which suffer the highest burden of mines and unexploded ordnance in the world. For example, in 2002 and 2003, we provided more than A$5 million to mine action programmes in Cambodia alone, focusing on demining, mine risk education, victim assistance and integrated programmes.

However, we have not focused solely on our region. Australia announced in May 2003 a contribution of A$1.5 million to demining activities in Iraq through the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS). Of that amount, A$1.2 million has enabled UNMAS to undertake a rapid assessment of mine and unexploded ordnance hazards, while A$300,000 will permit the placement of an Australian mine clearance expert with the mine action coordination team. Australia has also contributed A$2.5 million to UNMAS in Afghanistan in 2003.

Those country-specific contributions to UNMAS, along with our core contributions, are an acknowledgement of the significant role of UNMAS globally and, more specifically, of the effective assessment, coordination and resource mobilization function they have performed in Iraq and in Afghanistan.

As I have demonstrated, Australia remains firmly committed to the goal of a comprehensive and lasting solution to the global landmines problem. As co-Chair of the Standing Committee on Victim Assistance and Socio-Economic Reintegration, Australia will seek to promote awareness and encourage support for activities that address victim needs. In addition, we shall continue to support international action to halt the use of landmines through promoting universalization and effective implementation of the Treaty.

The collective efforts of Governments and civil society have brought us a long way. Australia is proud to be playing a significant role in this important area of humanitarian concern.

Mr. Heig (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): The entry into force of legal instruments such as the Ottawa Convention and the 1980 Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons has enabled us to make significant progress in protecting civil populations in conflict areas. Thanks to the measures adopted, the number of accidents and that of accident victims have decreased. However, significant efforts are still necessary. We must redouble our commitment to universalizing the ban on the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel mines and to

their destruction. More particularly, we must urge those States that have not yet done so to accede to the relevant conventions and their protocols as soon as possible. Only the joint efforts of international organizations, Governments and civil society, as well as those of non-governmental organizations, experts and directly affected populations, will enable us to eradicate the problem of mines and unexploded ordnance.

Switzerland believes that the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) has an important role. It must shoulder a core responsibility in coordinating and defining policies and in public relations activities. Its action supplements the significant contributions to anti-mine action made by other United Nations programmes and agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Health Organization. The terrible attacks in Baghdad against the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross remind us in the most tragic way of how difficult that task can be. In that context, Switzerland would like to reaffirm its full support for the efforts led by UNMAS and other United Nations agencies to rid the world of anti-personnel mines.

The universalization of treaties is a key element of our efforts to attain the objective of a world liberated from the scourge of anti-personnel mines. Since the Ottawa Convention's entry into force, States parties have realized that the success of such efforts and the implementation of the Convention involve taking all factors into account, including the use of mines by non-State actors. Switzerland believes it is high time for serious and in-depth analysis and discussion of that issue. Given the subject's complexity, Switzerland intends to create in the coming months an informal open-ended group to consider the question of non-State actors. We invite all interested States to participate constructively in that process.

Mines kill and mutilate; they cause unspeakable suffering. Moreover, they hamper reconstruction and the returning of land to cultivation, and they complicate the task of peace missions. And this scourge particularly affects the poorest countries, which are not in a position to fully clear their lands of mines without external aid. That is why Switzerland will continue to contribute approximately $10 million per year to humanitarian mine clearance and to creating anti-mine action capacities at the national or local level.

The mine clearance and prevention projects financed by Switzerland are closely coordinated with the relevant peace-building, humanitarian aid and development aid activities of our country. Switzerland is making available to United Nations mine clearance programmes and various non-governmental organizations logistics and information technology experts as well as project leaders and experts. Furthermore, Switzerland supplies material assistance and technical expertise, in particular for the destruction of booby traps and mines. Switzerland will step up its demining efforts during 2004 in the countries where it is already active. We will emphasize in particular the relationship between development and efforts to eradicate landmines and unexploded war ordnance.

Providing assistance to victims and reintegrating them into society have been, and will continue to be, priority obligations. My country has always believed that such assistance should be provided through an integrated approach that makes the best possible use of synergies. More specifically, there is a convergence of interests and objectives between mine-action measures and those carried out in the wider context of human security. With regard to mine action efforts, it is important that we take advantage of the work carried out by the Human Security Network. One of the goals of this informal Network — which consists of 13 countries, including Switzerland — is to provide assistance to victims. It is also active in the fight against AIDS and on the issue of child soldiers. My country will commit itself to ensuring that the issue of anti-personnel mines remains one of the Network's priorities.

Geneva has become the centre of international mine action. To date, Switzerland has hosted two meetings of States parties to the Ottawa Convention, as well as several intersessional meetings. I would also like to mention the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, which in recent years has become an internationally recognized centre for know-how and documentation. Switzerland invites States to continue to make use of Geneva's infrastructure and to draw on the wealth of knowledge located in the city.

At the heart of banning the use, stockpiling, production and transfer of anti-personnel mines and of limiting the use of certain conventional weapons is the

humanitarian belief that innocent civilians should be protected from the insidious and uncontrollable danger posed by those weapons. Even in times of conflict, civilians deserve a modicum of human security. But that principle, and the activities to which it gives rise, also provide us with opportunities that go beyond the purely humanitarian dimension. Demining projects can in fact also be used for general peace-building purposes — for example, by forming mixed mine-clearing groups from former enemy entities as a means of promoting reconciliation. Mine clearance campaigns and working jointly to identify areas to be cleared can also help to restore confidence among parties to a conflict. In the search for a settlement, a demining plan can serve as an easily negotiable element that is of interest to all parties in a peace process. It is up to us to come up with possible ways by which the fight against landmines can be made to benefit peace — over and above its humanitarian role and its impact on development.

The fight against landmines and unexploded war ordnance is a superb example of joint international effort, which is the only way to improve human security in the world. It is therefore all the more important not to waver in our efforts.

Mr. Hachani (Tunisia) (*spoke in French*): My delegation welcomes the report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/58/260, which is entitled "Assistance in mine action" and which is now before the General Assembly. That report attests to the remarkable progress that has been achieved with regard to the six strategic goals set out in the United Nations mine-action strategy for the period 2001-2005 — especially with respect to employing information technology, emergency-response capability, strengthening national mine-action capabilities and mobilizing resources.

Mine action is the best response to the devastating scourge of mines, which — in addition to their disastrous effects on the human level — also pose enormous socio-economic consequences to post-conflict development and to the restoration of normal social conditions. The five elements comprising mine action are complementary and address the issue in a comprehensive manner. Warning people about mines, education and raising awareness about the danger posed by mines are all fundamental steps in that connection. Mine clearance — including the detection of minefields, mapping and marking — is also vital, and must be a priority in the environs adjacent to populated areas. Providing assistance to victims, especially in helping to reintegrate them into society, is also an important component of mine action requiring support.

All of those efforts should be carried out while promoting the destruction of stocks of anti-personnel mines. In that regard, my delegation recognizes the vital role played by the Mine Action Service in focusing mine action within the United Nations system, especially with regard to coordination, devising policies in order to take action, and evaluating the threat posed by this scourge in numerous countries. We also duly appreciate the roles played by the United Nations Development Programme, UNICEF and other United Nations bodies and non-governmental organizations active in mine action.

Tunisia reaffirms its commitment to the implementation of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. My country was one of the first to sign the Convention and to begin to implement its provisions well before they entered into force. We are determined to continue to comply with our obligations in that regard.

Tunisia is also determined to pursue efforts, along with all other States, to completely eliminate anti-personnel landmines throughout the world. In that connection, my country encourages all States to participate actively in the Mine Ban Convention's intersessional mechanism in Geneva. My delegation welcomes the ever growing number of States to become parties to the Convention, which today number 141. The fifth Meeting of States Parties, which took place in Bangkok from 15 to 19 September 2003, was an opportunity once again to reaffirm the commitment of all States parties to eradicate these cruel weapons as soon as possible.

My country continues to suffer from the aftermath of the Second World War, part of which took place on Tunisian soil. Some of our territory is still infested by unexploded ordnance and anti-personnel landmines that are so deeply buried that they do not lend themselves to conventional detection methods. In that regard, an inter-agency, multisectoral mission took place in Tunisia from 20 to 24 January 2003 at the request of the Government in order to evaluate the nature and scope of the problem of landmines and

unexploded ordnance. The exercise made it possible to identify the obstacles that must be overcome and to make recommendations about possible steps to be taken in this area.

On 4 September 2003, Tunisia completed the destruction of its stocks of anti-personnel mines held by the national army. It did so in compliance with article 4 of the Ottawa Convention, and in advance of the 10 January 2004 date set for our country by the Convention. During that operation, at which the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Tunis, the Secretary General of the Tunisian Red Cross and representatives of the national media were present, 2,331 anti-personnel landmines were destroyed, bringing the total number of stockpiled mines destroyed to 17,575. It is important also to note that Tunisia has already transmitted its national report as well as annual updates to the United Nations Secretary-General, in conformity with the transparency measures provided under article 7 of the Convention.

Finally, in the context of Tunisia's commitment to the application of all the provisions of the Mine Ban Convention, a national committee to follow up the implementation of the Convention has been set up that includes representatives from the principal Tunisian ministries concerned.

Allow me to conclude by paying tribute to all those who are involved, in one manner or another, in the fight against the scourge of anti-personnel mines and who are working with the Governments of States Members of the United Nations and with international and non-governmental organizations, for their courage and for the sacrifices they have made in the service of this lofty cause. They all deserve the support of the Assembly.

Mr. Karanja (Kenya): I am pleased to take the floor to make some remarks on item 22 of our agenda, entitled "Question of assistance in mine action".

My delegation has taken note of the Secretary-General's report on assistance in mine action. The report brings to light several important initiatives and steps already undertaken in that domain under the six strategic objectives.

One of the objectives is the gathering of information or data on all aspects of the mine problem in various countries. The web-based databank and the Information Management System for Mine Action resulting from this effort are commendable. They are a rich source of information on global resources available for mine action. We encourage mine-affected countries and mine-action partners alike fully to exploit that system.

Another vital area addressed by the report is that of developing indigenous capacity. The availability of adequate local skilled personnel is a key factor in the sustainable success of any project. That step is thus laudable. Equally promising is the endeavour to build partnerships with other development agencies, as is the case between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank in some countries. We hope that this initiative has now been extended to more countries and agencies, as had been intended.

The availability of adequate funds is a sine qua non for mine action. We note with appreciation that, between 2001 and 2002, donor countries and other partners contributed some $28 million, which was used in 16 mine-affected countries. This amount has, however, not been adequate for the envisaged activities. It is hence crucial for the United Nations Mine Action Services to attract adequate resources and to ensure their rational utilization. We hope that assistance will continue to be extended in a transparent and balanced manner and in accordance with the respective needs of mine-affected countries.

Overall, the objectives and sub-objectives of the United Nations mine action strategy are numerous and extensive. It is therefore important to guard against overlapping or duplication in the process of pursuing the goals that have been set. Given that implementation of the objectives has been going on for some time now, it might be useful to review or refine them in light of experience gained. For instance, greater emphasis could be placed on selected activities targeted at, or limited to, immediate or urgent issues, such as rapid response, development of local capacity and mobilization of resources.

The question of assistance in mine action is a crucial aspect of the whole issue of anti-personnel mines, as underlined in article VI of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction.

Assistance is indispensable, especially in areas most directly linked to the core humanitarian

objectives of the Convention. These are: the destruction of existing stockpiles of mines, clearing mined areas, helping landmine survivors, and promoting the universal acceptance of the Mine Ban Convention.

Demining and providing assistance to landmine survivors are probably the most challenging of the humanitarian dimensions of the Convention. Clearing mines has proved to be a most tedious and costly affair. Ongoing demining work is thus proceeding at a snail's pace in most mine-affected countries. At that rate, demining will continue for many more years — perhaps for generations to come. For those countries — most of which are poor — this will mean, among other things, continued denial of access to large tracts of land, an indispensable resource for national development. Slow demining, in turn, inevitably means more casualties and leads to situations in which survivors must fend for themselves, thus increasing dependency.

Various countries and organizations have regularly provided assistance to demining efforts all over the world. They have donated, inter alia, equipment, sponsored training of deminers, and participation of representatives from mine-affected countries in activities of the Convention. We therefore commend all countries which have actively provided assistance for mine action.

In the same breath, it is important to emphasize that the current level of assistance is inadequate. It is imperative that those countries which are able but are not yet doing so urgently make their contribution. Those already providing assistance should consider increasing their contribution. It is important for all contributors to also engage in closer dialogue with mine-affected countries and to involve the United Nations as well as other relevant major international organizations in their mine-action projects. Such cooperation would help ensure that resources are deployed in an optimal manner.

The Mine Ban Convention is approaching a crossroads in its implementation. Its first Review Conference will be held from 29 October to 3 December 2004 in Nairobi, Kenya. My delegation attaches considerable importance to this Conference as it will enable us to review our achievements, assess where we stand vis-à-vis the requirements of the Convention, and chart the way forward. We thank all those delegations that have already emphasized their commitment to ensuring a successful 2004 Review Conference in Nairobi, and invite all States and organizations to participate at the highest possible level.

The African region has some of the most mine-affected countries in the world. Left on their own, these countries are unlikely to live up to their obligations, notably, completion of mine clearance within the deadlines set by the Convention, in addition to extending adequate care to landmine survivors. Their efforts will have to be supplemented in this regard. The question of assistance in mine action should, therefore, be substantively addressed at the Review Conference. The conclusions or outcome of the Conference should include a clear strategy on an enhanced framework for assistance to mine-affected countries. For its part, the United Nations could review its strategic objectives in mine action operations within the context of the forthcoming Review Conference.

Mr. Kryzhanivsky (Ukraine): Allow me to begin by paying tribute to all those involved in combating anti-personnel landmines and unexploded ordnance around the world, in particular, to commend the relentless efforts by the Standing Committees and States parties to the Ottawa Convention, the United Nations Mine Action Service and all relevant United Nations agencies, institutions and organizations united in their common cause to decrease human suffering and increase human security.

The Secretary-General's report in document A/58/260 constitutes an important element towards a more systematic and coordinated approach to international assistance in mine action. Ukraine acknowledges the progress described in the report and welcomes the revised United Nations mine action strategy for 2001-2005 proposed by the Secretary-General.

The readiness by the United Nations to implement suggestions by Member States regarding coordination, integration and prioritization, scope of mine action, political commitment and information sharing is particularly praiseworthy. The progress in implementation of strategy objectives includes substantial improvements in information management, finalization of a rapid response plan, development of national mine action plans, implementation of surveys and steps towards improved institutional coordination

and integration of mine action into overall assistance and development schemes. We call for the continuation of the efforts of the United Nations to foster the establishment of mine action capacities in those countries where unexploded ordnance and stockpiles constitute a serious threat to the safety, health and lives of the local population. This is of significant importance for Ukraine.

Ukraine recognizes the key role of the United Nations Mine Action Service, especially in the fields of policy-making, coordination and advocacy.

From our perspective it is important at this stage that national mine action strategies are set up with a view to ensuring effective decision-making about short-, medium- and long-term priorities. National and international support for mine action must be sustainable and must encourage and support national initiatives and institutions. The needs of the mine-affected community must set the basic parameters for assistance in mine action. At the same time the allure of operational mine clearance should not deflect attention from other aspects of mine action, such as victim assistance.

While important progress has been made in mine action during the past years, the number of countries and areas that require and request assistance also continues to increase. The need to obtain adequate resources remains a constant challenge for the United Nations. Therefore, the timely mobilization of resources from donors is essential to the success of mine action programmes.

Ukraine is convinced that the prohibition of production, use, stockpiling and transfer of anti-personnel mines should become the ultimate goal of the international community. At the same time we are confident that this goal should be pursued gradually while ensuring the largest possible participation of States in Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons of 1980.

It is not by from secondary sources that Ukraine knows the problems and sufferings resulting from the uncontrolled use of mines. Despite the fact that more than a half century has passed since the end of the Second World War, every year our specialists neutralize tens of thousands of pieces of ammunition and unexploded ordnance.

On 27 May this year, Ukraine completed the first significant destruction project, which allowed us to destroy 400,000 anti-personnel landmines of various types. We commit ourselves to continue the destruction process to get rid of Ukraine's six million landmines in stockpiles. In this regard, we deeply appreciate the commitment and the generosity demonstrated by Canada, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the European Union, as well as by numerous organizations inside and outside the United Nations system, to assist us with the implementation of the Ottawa Convention obligations. Ukraine will continue its support for a universalization of the Ottawa Convention, and the work relating to Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. To date the preparatory activities for the ratification of the Ottawa Convention have been under way in my country. We also continue actively to work on the establishment of a national mine action centre.

Mine action is one of the priorities of Ukraine's peace and security policies. We acknowledge that responsibility for addressing the problem of landmines and unexploded ordnance rests with the authorities of mine-affected countries. But we believe also that when national resources are lacking, the suffering caused by anti-personnel landmines and unexploded ordnance needs to be addressed within a humanitarian and development framework. We are convinced that the United Nations can and should play an important role in both.

Despite the difficulties we experience, Ukraine has extensive experience in modern mine clearance technologies, and its advanced logistics base allows for the training of highly skilled specialists within a short period of time. Ukrainian mine clearance engineers are widely recognized in various regions of the world, including the former Yugoslavia, Angola, Sierra Leone and Lebanon. Ukrainian units operate under United Nations standards and operational procedures and we are ready to provide technical support to and share our experience with United Nations missions in various countries. Ukraine's participation in demining activities is a demonstration of our commitment to international obligations in the field of anti-personnel mines.

In closing, I should like to emphasize that tremendous humanitarian and development problems caused by the presence of mines and other unexploded ordnance continue to constitute an obstacle to the

development of many States and have serious and lasting social and economic consequences, first of all, for their populations. From this rostrum, I reaffirm my country's firm resolve to cooperate with United Nations assistance programmes to eliminate mines and unexploded ordnance in Ukraine and throughout the world and call upon all Member States to assist mine-affected countries in developing relevant national programmes in accordance with the provisions of the Ottawa Convention.

Mr. Ozawa (Japan): Japan attaches great importance to mine-action assistance and continues to play an active role in this field. We believe that in many post-conflict situations, addressing the landmine problem is a precondition for consolidating peace and commencing with reconstruction. Our recently revised Official Development Assistance Charter gives priority to mine-related assistance, as this enhances the necessary stability and security of local communities in post-conflict situations.

With regard to the conceptual framework of human security, it goes without saying that mine action promotes human security. Furthermore, the Government of Japan is working actively, together with civil society and the international community, to achieve the objectives of the Zero Victims Initiative.

As a dedicated actor and contributor in the field of mine-action assistance, the Government of Japan is encouraged by the recent report of the Secretary-General (A/58/260), which focused on the progress achieved in implementing the strategic goals and related objectives enumerated in the United Nations mine-action strategy. Progress in information technology and resource mobilization is particularly appreciated, as the Government of Japan has emphasized on several occasions that a more systematic approach is desirable in order for mine-action activities to be conducted as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Much remains to be done and we need to strive further to achieve our goal of zero victims, but the progress achieved to date gives us hope and confidence. We are assured that the revised strategy will again serve as valuable guidance for the United Nations entities involved in this field and will further foster coordination and accountability throughout the mine-action community.

Japan has provided assistance to more than 25 affected countries and areas to enable them to carry out mine-action activities, including mine clearance, victim assistance, and mine-awareness training and education. My Government fulfilled its pledge for financial assistance totalling 10 billion yen, roughly $90 million, in the five years following 1998, reaching the target figure by the end of last October. I am also pleased to note that as of October of this year, Japan's total contribution to the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action, managed by the United Nations Mine Action Service, stood at about $23.7 million, which is one of the largest sums contributed by any donor.

In addition to financial contributions and traditional types of assistance for mine-clearance activities, the Government of Japan recently took the initiative of applying Japan's technological expertise to the development of more advanced and efficient equipment for the detection and clearance of mines, in cooperation with private companies and researchers, taking into account the advice and opinions of deminers in the field. We expect that these new technologies will enhance the good work being done in the field.

Victim assistance and mine awareness are also important. We are making efforts to prevent any increase in the number of landmine victims and to provide assistance to those already victimized. It is also noteworthy that non-governmental organizations have been making a substantial contribution to a range of mine-action activities. The Government of Japan will strive to increase the effectiveness of its assistance to mine action by strengthening dialogue and coordination with non-governmental organizations, as well as by supporting their work through grants and subsidies.

Let me share with you some information and some of our concrete efforts and ideas regarding assistance for mine action. With regard to assistance to South-East Asia, which accounts for 38 per cent of our total mine-action aid, the Government of Japan is currently consulting with the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining on the establishment of a regional support centre for the Information Management System for Mine Action. We hope this initiative will facilitate development and improvement in information management regarding mine action in South-East Asia.

We are also strongly committed to mine-related assistance in Afghanistan. Japan has contributed over $50 million to aid mine-action activities in that country, a sum that includes grants to a mine-clearance programme carried out as part of the Afghan New Beginnings Programme for the employment of demobilized ex-combatants. Japan will continue to support the efforts of Afghanistan to consolidate peace and enhance nation-building in cooperation with United Nations missions and other donors.

Japan's contribution to mine action extends to African countries including Angola, Mozambique, Sudan, Zambia, Rwanda, Chad, Ethiopia and Eritrea. We sincerely hope that our assistance will contribute to realizing peace and security, which are prerequisites for development.

Regarding the situation in Iraq, we are concerned about the threat of mines and unexploded ordnance in that country, especially since United Nations assisted operations were largely suspended due to security constraints. The Government of Japan is exploring the possibility of supporting programmes related to mine risk education, mine awareness campaigns, and a mine and unexploded ordnance survey through the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action of the United Nations Mine Action Service.

I would like to conclude my statement by reaffirming the determination of the Government of Japan to continue its endeavours, in collaboration with other stakeholders in this field, towards overcoming landmine problems on a global scale and thus making our world a safer place for us all.

Mr. Shore (Canada): As we approach the fifth anniversary of the Ottawa Convention's entry into force, it remains from Canada's perspective the definitive international framework for ensuring that the human tragedy caused by anti-personnel landmines is truly and permanently addressed. It also represents a remarkable success and a model of what Governments, civil society and multilateral institutions can achieve when they work together towards a common cause.

The role of the United Nations in mine action remains absolutely central. Canada applauds and supports the activities of the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) in its important coordinating role and in assessing the threat of anti-personnel landmines throughout the world. We thank the United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs for its work in support of the Ottawa Convention's meetings of States Parties and in ensuring the effective dissemination of reports submitted under article 7 of the Convention.

We extend our appreciation to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for its commitment to develop long-term capacity to manage and implement mine action programmes and we thank the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for its spirited promotion and delivery of mine risk education. We also acknowledge and appreciate the important role played by other United Nations agencies in efforts to overcome the insidious effects of anti-personnel landmines.

Our success in advancing the Convention's core humanitarian objectives is clear. The number of States using or producing anti-personnel mines continues to decrease, global trade has essentially ceased and stockpiles are being progressively eliminated by the millions. Support for the Convention, which now includes 141 States, continues to grow at a steady pace. Considerable resources are being deployed to clear more valuable land and assist victims in a larger number of countries. Most importantly, of course, casualty rates continue in an overall downward trend.

But clearly the job is not yet done. There are still some 200 million mines stockpiled globally, 15 States are still listed as producers of these weapons, four United Nations Member States openly acknowledged using anti-personnel mines last year, the development of countless communities is restricted by mines that remain in the ground in over 80 countries and between 15,000 and 20,000 people still fall victim to these indiscriminate weapons every year, the majority of which, of course, are civilians.

So the urgent need to address this humanitarian imperative remains. As we seek new and innovative ways to promote a broader understanding and acceptance of international mine action norms, we must focus our attention on securing an ever increasing — and ultimately universal — acceptance of our common goals. The United Nations has always been an essential partner in this regard and will no doubt continue to play a central role as we collectively face the significant challenges that remain.

A very concrete step in this regard was the Secretary-General's recent review this past summer of the United Nations mine action strategy for 2001-2005.

While the strategy achieved a number of measurable successes in its first two years, this review takes into account new challenges that have emerged, reflects new priorities and establishes new timetables. Canada is therefore very pleased that the United Nations continues to place a priority on the global eradication of anti-personnel mines and is fully supportive of this endeavour.

Canada is also committed to meeting its article 6 obligations in support of the universalization and implementation of the Ottawa Convention. This commitment was affirmed in concrete terms last winter, when Prime Minister Chrétien announced the decision to renew the Canadian Landmine Fund for an additional five years, beginning in 2003, which will eventually lead to the integration of mine action programming into core departmental budgets, in particular, our development budget. This will ensure that the humanitarian objectives of the Convention are achieved, and that its sustainability over the longer term is assured.

We also support the view vigorously advanced by the United Nations that mine action in severely mine-affected developing countries is a fundamental precondition for sustainable development and we were, therefore, pleased to see it included in the Secretary-General's review of the United Nations mine action strategy. It is clear that the presence of these weapons in many situations presents a major obstacle to post-conflict recovery, peace and security. We support United Nations efforts in this regard and agree that mine action must be an integral component of national development priorities and poverty reduction strategies for mine-affected States. We also strongly urge the international development community to respond positively to requests from developing countries when mine action is put forward in these terms.

Finally, in the same vein, Canada believes it is crucial for the United Nations and its Member States to acknowledge the critical role mine action has to play in advancing the Organization's broader purposes of peace, security and development throughout the world. One way in which this reality could be given concrete recognition is through the dedication of a more appropriate share of regular budget resources to core mine action operations such as those of UNMAS, UNDP and UNICEF.

An essential ingredient in ensuring our collective success, which is well understood and exemplified by this forum, is the spirit of shared responsibility and genuine partnership that has characterized the global campaign against anti-personnel landmines from the outset. The first Review Conference of the Ottawa Convention, which will be held in Nairobi from 29 November to 3 December 2004, will serve as a very prominent example of this major achievement.

Future progress will clearly require that we sustain and strengthen these partnerships and, as we forge new ones, that we coordinate our various interests and initiatives into a coherent framework and comprehensive action plan in preparation for the Review Conference. This will ensure that we arrive with a detailed understanding of the progress made to date and the challenges that remain and that we are prepared to collectively reaffirm our commitment to meeting these challenges head on. The United Nations, its Member States, regional organizations and, of course, our non-governmental organization partners will all be indispensable in this regard.

We strongly encourage each of these actors to send representation from the highest possible level during the high-level segment planned for the end of the Review Conference, and we encourage Secretary-General Kofi Annan to personally attend. His profile, and that of the other leaders, will send a strong message to the international community and will make a significant difference in energizing our collective efforts.

From Canada's perspective, it is fitting that the Review Conference will be held on the most mine-affected continent on earth, a continent which played a pivotal role in the creation of the Convention and which has done so much to see it implemented across Africa. Canada would like to extend our congratulations to Kenya for hosting this important event, which will also serve to underline the key role the United Nations plays in mine action.

Finally, we would also like to pledge our full cooperation to all those who share our conviction that the Review Conference will provide an ideal opportunity to reaffirm our collective commitment to finishing a job in which has achieved so much already.

Mr. Lew Kwang-chul (Republic of Korea): At the outset, I would like to express my appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report on the

progress made on the implementation of the United Nations mine action strategy for 2001-2005.

As indicated by the Secretary-General's report contained in A/58/260, the six strategic goals and related objectives laid out in the five-year strategy have provided an effective framework for steadily achieving and monitoring progress in the field of mine action. Since the issue of mine action was adopted as an agenda item of the General Assembly in 1993, the efforts of the international community to tackle that problem have brought greater public and political awareness to the issues surrounding landmines. As a result, we have seen a decrease in the production and use of anti-personnel landmines, a de facto moratorium on the transfer of such weapons, the clearing of many mined areas and the destruction of millions of stockpiled landmines. Most importantly, in recent years there has been a significant decline in the number of mine-related casualties.

While this progress is laudable, we must not lose sight of the many formidable tasks that remain before us. Landmines continue to pose a deadly threat to innocent civilians in conflict and post-conflict areas, not only claiming lives, but also impeding socio-economic development, reconstruction efforts and humanitarian aid operations. In response, the five-year mine-action strategy employs a comprehensive approach to coordinate progress in mine awareness, emergency assistance, mine clearance and resource mobilization, all of which are essential to counter this threat. We hope that the strategy will help us to make great progress towards achieving those goals in the coming years.

Let me take a few moments to comment on some of the latest developments in mine action that my delegation believes are of particular importance.

First, we were particularly pleased to see the rapid-response framework designed to bolster emergency response capabilities put into effect in Iraq in early 2003. We commend the collaborative efforts of those United Nations bodies that worked with non-governmental organizations to deploy a mine-action coordination team to Iraq. We hope that the work of this team will have a positive impact. In the same vein, the progress made by the Mine-Action Programme for Afghanistan has been significant. Not only has the Programme doubled in size in response to the increasing need for mine-action involvement in humanitarian, development and reconstruction initiatives, but it has made improvements in its operating procedures and outreach activities and has cleared a substantial number of high-priority mine-affected areas. In addition, my delegation welcomes the advances that have been made in mine action in other afflicted areas of the world, including in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Macedonia, Lebanon and Sudan.

Secondly, recognizing that the comprehensive collection and management of information is essential for effective mine action, my delegation commends the continued work of the inter-agency and multisectoral missions undertaken by the United Nations Mine Action Service in conjunction with the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund and other agencies to assess the needs of mine-affected countries. We further welcome the continued development and maintenance of the E-MINE information network as it becomes the centre for mine-related information on the Internet. We were pleased to see the expansion of the site to include 800 new items and access to a database of individual countries progress in destroying their stockpiles of mines. In that context, my delegation looks forward to the further development and utilization of technology for the detection, removal and destruction of mines and unexploded ordnance.

Thirdly, as highlighted in the Secretary-General's conclusions, efforts to build effective partnerships with international organizations, with a view to integrating their mine-action activities into humanitarian and development efforts, are crucial to the success of the fight to eliminate landmines. Close cooperation among all stakeholders remains indispensable, not only in coordinating activities and sharing best practices, but also in mobilizing resources. In that regard, my delegation would like to stress the importance of the central coordinating role of the United Nations in generating synergy among diverse actors. In particular, we would like to commend the efforts of the United Nations Mine Action Service, which has served as the focal point for international mine-action activities.

The Republic of Korea is committed to the global effort to protect civilians from the scourge of landmines. Since 1997, the Korean Government has faithfully enforced an indefinite extension of its moratorium on the export of anti-personnel mines. In 2001, my Government acceded to the Convention on

Certain Conventional Weapons and its Amended Protocol II, which became effective on 9 November 2001. Since its accession, my Government has actively participated in the relevant discussions within the framework of that Convention.

In closing, the Republic of Korea recognizes that one of the prerequisites for effective action is a substantial resource base, and it has, therefore, provided support to various United Nations-led mine assistance programmes. My Government has made annual contributions to the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action and remains an active participant in the Mine Action Support Group. We share the Secretary-General's view that the United Nations should secure sound funding to meet the growing requests from mine-affected countries. With that in mind, the Korean Government will continue to make due contributions to this noble cause.

Mr. Assaf (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to express our gratitude and appreciation to the Secretariat for its reports on this subject and for its efforts in affirming the role of the United Nations in the fight against mines.

Landmines are a universal human tragedy. They are discreet killers: the victim comes to the mine, the mine does not go to the victim. Mines are patient killers; they can lie in wait for their victims for decades, haunting people even after wars and conflict are over, threatening the lives of civilians and impeding economic and social development.

The international dimension of the mine scourge is reflected in a simple statistic: the number of existing mines is estimated to be in the hundreds of millions; they are deployed in some 90 countries and claim the lives of about 15,000 victims annually, most of them civilians.

Lebanon is among those States victimized by the presence of mines. The Israeli occupation left behind a large number of them — some 450,000, according to United Nations estimates. Of these, the Israeli anti-personnel mine known as Mine No. 4 makes up 90 per cent. Today, those mines are deployed along the Blue Line and the neighbouring villages, from Naqoura in the west to Kfarshoba in the east, over an estimated area of over 100 square kilometres. This has led to the deaths of scores of civilians and the wounding and disabling of over 200 others, and has impeded governmental development efforts by effectively removing a large area from agricultural or industrial exploitation.

The mine clearance process in Lebanon has been guided by the six main goals and the 48 subsidiary objectives defined by the United Nations mine action strategy for the period 2001-2005, as is evident from the following. First, the United Nations has played a major role in highlighting the problem of mines in southern Lebanon. In his most recent report to the Security Council on the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) (S/2003/728), the Secretary-General noted that the mines were a source of great concern. Moreover, Security Council resolution 1496 (2003) urged donor States to increase their contributions to mine clearance activities and called on Israel, which is still withholding mine maps for 20 per cent of the relevant areas, to give those maps to the Lebanese Government.

Secondly, donor States responded to the request of Lebanon and the United Nations for assistance. Contributions both in cash and in kind were provided, most notably by the United States, the European Union, France, the United Kingdom, Saudi Arabia and others. In that connection, I would like to single out the United Arab Emirates for its contribution of $50 million.

Thirdly, Lebanon established the Lebanese National Demining Office and in cooperation with the United Nations and the United Arab Emirates, the Mine Action Coordination Centre of Southern Lebanon was established. Contracts were signed with two commercial mine clearance companies employing some 317 mine experts. Furthermore, a forestation project was launched, with the motto "a tree for every mine".

Fourthly, a Ukrainian UNIFIL contingent is undertaking mine clearance in an area bordering the Blue Line, where it plans to clear some 1,000 fields contaminated by more than 250,000 mines. The process is expected to take a long time — possibly seven years.

Fifthly, the National Demining Office, with the assistance of a number of non-governmental organizations, is educating the local population about mine risks. That education programme has reached 500,000 of the 800,000 inhabitants of the area. Also, the Mine Action Coordination Centre publishes periodic reports detailing the achievements made and the challenges that remain, and its web site will soon be operational.

Those measures have led to a decrease in the number of mine victims, from 14 deaths and 71 injuries in 2001, to 4 deaths and 38 injuries in 2002. Also, approximately 60,000 mines and unexploded ordnance have been cleared from land and fields that were then returned to their owners. In that context, we reaffirm that Israel, which planted the mines in southern Lebanon, should take responsibility for the mine clearance costs and compensate Lebanon for the damage inflicted.

Finally, Lebanon, which appreciates the solidarity of the international community with respect to its mine problem, reaffirms its cooperation, in turn, with the international community to eliminate that scourge and create a world free of mines.

Mr. Pavlovich (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): We are entering a very important juncture in the Ottawa process. In a year's time, Nairobi will host the first Review Conference of the States Parties to the Mine Ban Convention, which will take stock of what has been achieved so far and introduce mechanisms to ensure the broader universality of the Convention.

It is my pleasure to update members on Belarus's participation in the Ottawa process. The Republic of Belarus is a State party to almost all international agreements in the field of international security, non-proliferation and arms control. In implementing those agreements, Belarus contributes to strengthening regional and global security and stability.

On 3 September 2003, Belarus deposited with the Secretary-General its instrument of accession to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction.

At the national level, we have conducted an in-depth study of the provisions of the Convention and the international commitments stemming from it. According to that study, even under the most favourable conditions, Belarus will need substantial financial and technical resources to carry out the destruction of its stockpiles of more than 4 million anti-personnel mines — our unwanted heritage from the Soviet Union. Of those, 3.6 million are of the PFM type — mines containing liquid explosives. There are still a number of technical issues with respect to the safe and secure destruction of the stockpiled PFM-1 and PFM-1S mines for which the international community as a whole needs to find answers.

According to the provisions of the Ottawa Convention, our country must eliminate its mine stockpiles within a four-year period. Last year, we destroyed more than 22,000 anti-personnel mines. This year, before joining the Convention, Belarus destroyed more than 100,000 mines. While non-PFM mines can be destroyed through open burning or open detonation, those destruction techniques cannot be used with PFM-1 and PFM-1S mines for ecological reasons.

Under those circumstances, we appeal to Governments, international agencies and non-governmental organizations to assist the Republic of Belarus in its stockpile elimination efforts. All kinds of technical, technological and financial assistance would be warmly welcomed.

In that context, the Republic of Belarus welcomes the mechanism incorporated in the Ottawa Convention for international cooperation and financial and technological assistance among parties for mine clearance and the destruction of stocks of anti-personnel mines.

Belarus welcomes the positive and important role played by non-governmental organizations in the international movement to ban anti-personnel landmines. During the process of acceeding to the Ottawa Convention, we found the Belarus branch of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines to be a reliable partner.

The Republic of Belarus supports the practice of providing annual reports on landmines, and supplies the necessary information for such reports. We believe that that process represents a unique civil society control mechanism to ensure that all States comply with existing international agreements in dealing with mine-related problems.

The first years since the implementation of the Ottawa Convention have revealed a number of problems, but we share the view that any undertaking of that type will encounter difficulties. I hope that in future a positive approach will be taken to resolving such difficult issues in accordance with the strict implementation of the provisions of the Convention. The Ottawa Convention has become a powerful tool and provides us with an opportunity to complete a noble mission — the total prohibition and elimination and anti-personnel landmines, which have caused enormous suffering on all continents.

Mr. MacKay (New Zealand): The legacy of war is not easily overcome, and that is especially true in those countries where many landmines and large amounts of unexploded ordnance remain. In response to the humanitarian crisis caused by mines and unexploded ordnance, New Zealand has been active on a number of fronts.

New Zealand supports mine action in a variety of ways in Afghanistan, Cambodia, Iraq, Laos, Mozambique and Sri Lanka. These include the provision of mine-clearance personnel in Cambodia and Mozambique and support for the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) in New York, as well as for non-governmental organizations involved in mine clearance and mine-awareness programmes.

In countries such as Afghanistan and Cambodia, the area of land to be cleared of mines and unexploded ordnance is overwhelming, and success will be achieved only over a number of years. We believe that further work needs to be carried out on establishing firmer estimates on the extent of the mine problem globally. For New Zealand's part, where possible we have focused on capacity-building within the affected community as one way of assisting mine-affected countries in the long term. Mine action should be part of a comprehensive strategy towards reconstruction and development in the aftermath of conflict.

New Zealand strongly supports the work of UNMAS, a focal point for mine action within the United Nations system playing an important role as a coordinator of mine activities with non-governmental organizations and regional authorities. We welcome the Secretary-General's report, which reviews the progress of United Nations mine-action strategy for the period 2001-2005. There have clearly been a number of positive steps since 2001, including the development of an operational framework for rapid response and the Mine-Action Guidelines for Ceasefire and Peace Agreements.

The Ottawa Convention banning the use, stockpiling and production of anti-personnel mines continues to be a successful and constructive forum for mine action. New Zealand continues to be a steadfast supporter of the Ottawa Convention, not only as an instrument of disarmament significance but, more importantly, as a precedent-setting humanitarian instrument. We call on those States outside the Ottawa Convention to respect the now firmly established norm against the use of anti-personnel mines and to join the Convention without delay. Next year New Zealand will be taking up a position on the Bureau as co-rapporteur of the Standing Committee on General Status and Operation of the Convention. We look forward to working with partners in the lead-up to next year's Review Conference, to be held in Kenya.

States parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) will arrive at a critical juncture this month when we find out whether a legally binding instrument addressing the humanitarian impact of explosive remnants of war and providing a mandate for anti-vehicle mines can be achieved. At that meeting, the credibility of the CCW forum will be on the line, as the dreadful toll of deaths and injuries caused by explosive remnants of war and anti-vehicle mines is well known. The proposal for an instrument on explosive remnants of war has the potential to assist mine-clearance operations in carrying out demining work more expeditiously and effectively and to prevent casualties and injuries from explosive remnants of war. That potential will be realized only through a legally-binding instrument which unambiguously sets out the obligations on States parties to firmly establish a strong norm on clearance and underlines the importance of measures to protect civilians.

Finally, we wish to express our appreciation for the non-governmental organizations that work on mine-action issues, in particular the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, which continues to successfully mobilize support for the Ottawa Convention, and the International Committee of the Red Cross, whose efforts in the field and in the area of international humanitarian law are invaluable. The New Zealand non-governmental organization Campaign Against Landmines continues to pursue the full universalization and implementation of the Ottawa Convention in the Pacific region; those efforts are also greatly appreciated by the New Zealand Government.

We welcome the opportunity provided by this debate, because mine action requires all of our collective efforts to build a more secure and stable future for those unfortunate communities affected by mines.

Mr. Khan (Pakistan): The nature and scope of the problem created by the irresponsible use of landmines is enormous. Almost 40 per cent of United Nations Member States face the problem of landmines

in one form or another. The victims are mostly innocent civilians, women and children, both during and after conflicts.

The latest figures show that an estimated 110 million anti-personnel mines are scattered around 70 countries. This alarming situation requires immediate remedial measures to be taken.

In our neighbourhood, Afghanistan has to cope with the scourge of over 10 million landmines, which cause hundreds of casualties every month. Added to this problem is the existence of unexploded ordnance. Two decades of foreign occupation and internecine war has left the entire country infested with landmines and unexploded ordnance. Despite the paucity of Pakistan's medical facilities, hundreds of Afghan mine victims are being treated in our hospitals and health centres. Many have been provided with artificial limbs in order to help them to rehabilitate their lives and regain their livelihood.

Encouragingly, there is today greater international realization of the need to address the problems posed by landmines and unexploded ordnance. The Secretary-General's report entitled "Assistance in mine action" (A/58/260) and his report on the third-year review of the five-year United Nations mine strategy (A/58/260/Add.1) reflect these positive trends. The successes noted in the Secretary-General's report are worth recounting.

There is now greater awareness of mine-action problems through the use of information technology. There is also an improved capacity to respond to emergencies. In this regard, the emergency mine action programme in Iraq and in seven other priority countries, including Afghanistan, have received greater attention from the United Nations agencies.

Capacity-building has been undertaken in 30 nations to enable them to cope with emergencies relating to landmines and unexploded ordnance. Enhanced resource mobilization has had a positive impact on increasing the mine-action coverage area. As compared to the donation of $28 million received by the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) last year, $67 million has been mobilized this year. This is truly commendable.

However, there are four areas which need immediate and concerted efforts. First, there is a need to increase the programme outreach of UNMAS through electronic and print media. Radio and television can play a vital role in raising awareness among people living in mine-infested regions and in sensitizing the donor countries at the popular level so that they remain engaged in mine-action efforts.

Secondly, there is a need to increase the participation of national authorities in mine action programmes by providing equipment and training to the local people. This can further decrease the time required for demining operations.

Thirdly, modern demining technologies should be made available to the affected countries, so that demining operations can gather momentum and enhance the safety of the personnel involved in such operations.

Fourthly, demining operations should be supplemented with rehabilitation programmes, such as those providing artificial limbs to mine victims and affording them job opportunities closer to their homes.

Pakistan is committed to the peace and prosperity of humanity. In that regard, apart from being the largest troop contributor to United Nations-led peacekeeping operations, Pakistan has in the past actively contributed to demining operations in several affected countries. Pakistan has participated actively in demining operations in Kuwait, Cambodia, Angola, Bosnia and the Western Sahara. We are also helping in demining operations in Sierra Leone and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We are ready to provide training facilities to all mine-affected countries.

Pakistan is against the irresponsible use of landmines, which have caused so much destruction, pain and misery. Pakistan remains committed to ensuring the highest standards of responsibility in the use of these defensive weapons. Pakistan is a party to the Amended Protocol II of the Certain Conventional Weapons Convention (CCW), which regulates the use of landmines in both internal and external conflicts, to prevent civilians from falling victim to landmines. We are continuing to implement the Protocol with the greatest earnestness.

Pakistan enjoys a unique record: clearing all its minefields following the three wars in South Asia. No humanitarian problem has ever been caused by the use of those mines. We remain committed to ensuring that the mines in our military inventory will never become a

cause of civilian casualties in Pakistan or elsewhere in the world.

Churchill once said: "The United Nations is not to take us to heaven, but to save us from hell." That is very true. Let us together save the world from the hell of landmines and of war. Let us work for peace for us today and peace for our children tomorrow.

Mr. Amer (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) (*spoke in Arabic*): In considering the item entitled "Assistance in mine action", the General Assembly is once again reaffirming the importance that the international community attaches to the threat posed by landmines, which are deployed in more than 60 countries. Every year mines kill or maim thousands of people in those countries and cause vast economic losses and environmental damage, which hamper those countries' efforts to create conditions conducive to sustainable development.

In his report submitted to the Assembly under the provisions of resolution 57/159, the Secretary-General focuses on the progress made in implementing the six strategic objectives of the United Nations mine action strategy for 2001-2005.

Libya notes that the United Nations system has played a significant role in the implementation of those objectives. The United Nations has already provided assistance and advice to a number of countries with a view to putting an end to the tragedies resulting from those weapons.

As Libya stated at the previous session, we hope that, for the duration of the five-year strategy and beyond, such assistance will be provided to all countries in order to enable them to rid themselves of these weapons with indiscriminate effects, which devastate the lives of innocent people and cause tremendous damage.

In document A/58/260/Add.1, the Secretary-General states that, as a result of the 2003 review of the United Nations mine-action strategy, a number of the plan's objectives have been modified. Of course, we support the determination of the United Nations to encourage all countries to accede to international human rights instruments and to abide by international humanitarian law with respect to the rights of individuals affected by mines or unexploded ordnance.

We know that one of the goals of the Organization is to achieve the universality of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, since it is one of the major pillars of international efforts to put an end to this devastating scourge. However, it is doubtful that this goal can be achieved if the views and concerns of many countries, including mine, are not taken into account.

We have certain reservations on the Convention as concerns national security, in particular with respect to countries whose territories include vast areas that cannot be otherwise protected. The Convention ignores a very important issue — that is to say, the legal responsibility of the colonial countries, which planted mines on the territory of other countries — although this is a very important aspect of international relations.

That responsibility has been reaffirmed in a number of resolutions adopted by regional and international organizations. At the Summit of the Group of 77 and China, which was held at Havana, a number of resolutions were adopted by the Organization of African Unity that make explicitly clear the responsibility of those countries that planted mines on the territories of others during colonial wars and call on those States to allocate funds from their military budgets for demining and to provide information about mines and assistance to the victims of mines.

In the final document of the Non-Aligned Movement Summit, held in Kuala Lumpur last February, heads of State or Government expressed their concern about the remnants of the Second World War — particularly mines — which have claimed lives, caused material damage and hampered development. They called upon countries responsible for planting mines to cooperate with the affected countries by submitting the needed information, including maps of mine sites; by providing technical demining assistance; and by paying compensation for any losses incurred.

My country, Libya, continues to suffer from the problem of mines and other remnants of war that were planted on its territory during the Second World War. Reports by the United Nations and other organizations have verified that Allied and Axis Powers planted millions of mines and other ordnance in North Africa, which have claimed the lives of thousands of innocent civilians and permanently disabled many others, in addition to hampering our development in our efforts to

fight desertification, build roads, utilize our natural resources and expand our agriculture.

Although more than half a century has now elapsed since the war ended and both defeated and victorious forces withdrew, mines and unexploded ordnance are still buried in our territory. They are sometimes accidentally detonated by development workers, herders or hikers who can become permanently disabled as a result. That tragedy continues because the warring parties at the time did not place markers clearly indicating minefield locations. As a result, innocent civilians have perished, and we still have not received any maps providing information on this matter that would enable us to eradicate the weapons buried in Libyan territory.

In 1998, Libya and Italy signed an agreement to cooperate in mine clearance efforts in Libya, to provide treatment and compensation for affected victims, to established a joint fund to finance the rehabilitation of mine-affected areas and to establish a medical centre for treating people maimed as a result of mines. Italy has partially implemented the agreement in Benghazi. We should like to reiterate that the agreement is a very welcome precedent. We hope that the other two countries that planted mines in Libya during the Second World War — the United Kingdom and Germany — will follow Italy's lead and respond to our legitimate request by agreeing to assist the Libyan authorities in putting an end to this problem and to compensate the Libyan people for the losses and damage caused by mines that were planted in our soil more than half a century ago.

The great number of both new and old mines that remain buried in many countries' territories reminds us that the international community has a long way to go before innocent civilians are fully rid of this lethal weapon. However, the efforts made thus far are encouraging. It is essential that all United Nations Member States renew their commitment to clearing mines and other explosive remnants of war from the affected areas — not merely discussing the issue, but truly eliminating new and old mines. The Libyan delegation affirms that that will be one of the goals of the remaining period of the current five-year mine action strategy and of the new strategy proposed by the Secretary-General for the five-year period 2005-2009.

We believe it is very important that all relevant efforts by the international community, including my country, focus on finding a solution that will address reservations with regard to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction. We can do that by annexing a protocol to the Convention that would provide for countries' security interests while helping us to remove old mines, which — like new ones — are wreaking havoc on people's lives and property and hampering efforts to end desertification and to achieve and enhance sustainable development.

Mr. Castellón Duarte (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the country members of the Central American Integration System: Belize, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Panama and my own country, Nicaragua.

At the outset, I wish to thank the Secretary-General for his report, "Assistant in mine action" (A/58/260 and Add.1), which contains very important data on the activities being carried out in that sphere throughout the world. The report focuses on progress made in attaining the six strategic goals and related objectives listed in "United Nations mine action: a strategy for 2001-2005" (A/56/448/Add.1). That progress, according to the report, has been achieved in the following areas: greater information and improved information technology; improved emergency response capacity; sustained efforts to strengthen national mine action capacity; significant improvement in management quality; satisfactory resource mobilization; and greater promotion of relevant legal instruments.

All of our countries are States parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, known as the Ottawa Convention. It is a response by the international community aimed at achieving a total ban on such treacherous weapons. Likewise, none of the countries that I represent has produced or imported into its territory anti-personnel mines since signing the Convention.

Mine clearance operations in Central America have been of great importance in the past five years, because thousands of anti-personnel mines and other explosive devices were planted indiscriminately during the conflict years of the 1980s until the beginning of

the 1990s. A mine removal programme requested of the Organization of American States by Costa Rica, Honduras and Nicaragua in 1991 has successfully continued in operation, having accomplished its purpose in the first of the countries mentioned.

Until their deactivation — which frequently occurs many years after they were planted — anti-personnel mines, in addition to causing loss of human life and leaving survivors disabled, pose a threat to the civilian population, preventing fertile lands from being used for agriculture, making regional development impossible and limiting job opportunities — not to speak of the health and rehabilitation costs involved in providing assistance to mine victims. Those tasks lead to a diversion of the resources that are so necessary for the development of our peoples.

I shall now provide a brief description of the progress that has been achieved in our countries in dealing with the mine problem.

Costa Rica was declared a mine-free zone at a ceremony on 10 December 2002. Mines on Costa Rican territory resulted from a domestic conflict in Nicaragua during the 1980s and were planted along the border shared with that country. Costa Rica has never had any stockpiled mines.

In El Salvador, mine clearance concluded in 1994. It had been carried out by the International Danger Disaster Assistance company from Belgium, which had been contracted by the Government to perform this task. El Salvador was subsequently declared 97 per cent free of anti-personnel landmines. However, due to accidents that have taken place since then, local authorities, with the assistance of the International Demining Group, a British non-governmental organization, identified 33 areas suspected of containing unexploded ordnance in the former areas of conflict. Most of these devices were home made. The Government undertook actions to rid itself of those devices. The destruction of stockpiled mines in El Salvador concluded on 20 February 2003.

In Guatemala, the executive coordinating unit set up in 1997 prepared a national plan for mine clearance and the destruction of unexploded ordnance. It was originally scheduled to conclude its work in 2005 but operations were stepped up thanks to assistance received from donor countries and the conclusion of operations is now set for 2004.

Mines in Honduras were sown all along the Honduras-Nicaragua border by participants in the Nicaraguan conflict. The mine-clearance programme was scheduled to conclude in 2002 but a series of technical problems involving metal detectors, communications and other issues made it impossible to complete it on time. In May 2003, the last mine-clearance operation began in the department of El Paraiso. Mine clearance will thus conclude and Honduras will be declared to be free of mines by the end of this year. Honduras destroyed its stockpiled landmines on 2 November 2000.

The Dominican Republic, Panama and Belize have never used, manufactured, imported or stockpiled any anti-personnel landmines, nor have they used them for training. They are thus not affected by mines. But in Panama contamination of military stores resulted from military exercises and weapons field testing in the canal zone during the three decades that preceded 1997. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the ministries of health, education and foreign relations and non-governmental organizations are preparing an education plan for awareness-raising on unexploded military equipment that has been found among the population living around the affected areas. This project has been extended until 2004.

In Nicaragua, some 9,000 anti-personnel mines were deactivated by the middle of this year, leaving approximately 46,000 mines that must be cleared in an area covering 135,500 square metres in the north of the country. Due to various problems, such as a lack of emergency transport aircraft for medical evacuations, the topography of the terrain and the difficulty in locating mines because of the lack of precise reference points, displacement of mines from their original location as a result of rain or water flows, and plant growth in mined areas, landmine removal operations in Nicaragua will have to conclude in 2005 rather than in 2004 as had originally been scheduled. Nicaragua destroyed its stockpiled mines some time ago.

In view of the experience acquired by Nicaraguan, Honduran and Salvadoran sappers, the Governments of those countries decided to send some of these forces to Iraq to assist in mine clearance efforts in that country. In this way, we are showing solidarity with that country and are helping it eradicate this plague.

Central Americans have always worked together to achieve our objectives in mine clearance, and this is part of a strategy to entirely eradicate this threat from the region. The Central American Security Commission is preparing an integral regional programme for the education, medical care, rehabilitation and reinsertion into productive society of survivors of accidents caused by mines and unexploded ordnance in Central America. This will provide a comprehensive solution to the situation with preventive, educational and corrective criteria in order to improve the quality of life of those who survive anti-personnel landmine accidents.

We want the future generations of all parts of the world to live free from the suffering incurred by this plague of anti-personnel mines. We appeal to States that are not yet parties to the Ottawa Convention to adhere to it and to comply with its provisions. Their peoples and peoples throughout the world will thank them.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate for this meeting.

One representative has requested to exercise the right of reply.

May I remind members that statements in the exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to 5 minutes for the second intervention and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Shacham (Israel): I am taking the floor today in order to briefly clarify certain inaccuracies in the statement just made by the representative of Lebanon.

On 24 May 2000, Israeli forces completely withdrew from southern Lebanon in full and confirmed compliance with United Nations Security Council resolution 425 (1978). Five days later, on 29 May, Israel Defence Force liaison officers held a series of meetings with the senior command of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and transferred detailed maps previously used by the Israel Defence Force regarding the location in southern Lebanon of minefields and areas suspected of containing mines and other explosive devices. This also included all information regarding mines and other explosive devices planted by other elements operating in the area.

Upon receiving the Israeli maps and files, UNIFIL's senior command signed official confirmations of transfer of this information. Israel remains willing to assist, should any further clarifications be required with regard to the information it has transferred. Indeed, Israel's willingness to cooperate in mine clearance has already been demonstrated elsewhere in the world.

During the period of 1995 to 2001, Israel, in conjunction with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), conducted a mine-awareness project in Angola, which was aimed at educating the local population about the hazards of mines. Additionally, Israel conducted a joint mine clearance project with Jordan in the Arava Valley in order to enable the agricultural utilization of that area. Similarly, Israel, Jordan, Canada and Norway joined in a quadrilateral project aimed at Jordan Valley mine clearance and medical rehabilitation for Jordanian mine victims.

As is widely known, southern Lebanon has served as a breeding ground for terrorist activity for many years, in violation of international law including Security Council resolution 1373 (2001). Throughout this period, large quantities of mines, booby traps and other devices have been laid by terrorist groups and individual terrorists. These mines and explosive devices were never marked, mapped or reported, nor were the areas fenced off in order to avoid civilian casualties. Today, these mines and booby traps continue to pose a serious threat to the population.

Pursuant to United Nations Security Council resolution 425 (1978) and subsequent Security Council resolutions, and in accordance with international law, it is the responsibility of the Government of Lebanon to establish effective control and authority in the area and restore peace and security to southern Lebanon. Clearly, the failure to fulfil these responsibilities with respect, inter alia, to minefields, endangers the civilian population in the area. Let me cite one example. About one month ago, Israel detected a cluster of roadside mines which had been recently set up a few metres inside Lebanese territory, adjacent to the border fence in the central Gallilee sector, in the same area from which, last spring, terrorists infiltrated into Israel from Lebanon and carried out an attack on civilian vehicles near Kibbutz Matsuba, killing five Israelis. These explosive devices, ready to be triggered against any vehicle moving along the border road, prevent Israeli

patrols from effectively doing their job protecting the lives of civilians in our northern communities.

Out of respect for Lebanese sovereignty, and in compliance with Security Council resolution 425 (1978), Israel forces have refrained from crossing the Blue Line, even the few metres necessary, in order to remove these charges. Consequently, Israel turned to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) to request their assistance, which in turn presented the matter to the Lebanese authorities. However, although clearly informed of the presence of these explosive booby traps, Lebanese authorities did nothing to remove them, in clear violation of their legal responsibilities. Instead, they reported to UNIFIL that the terrorist elements which had originally planted the booby traps had now dismantled them. Needless to say, the mines are still there waiting to explode, preventing free movement on the Israeli side of the border and making it very difficult for us to protect our civilians from the terrorist threat continuing to emanate from Lebanese territory.

Regarding the last point raised by the Lebanese representative on the issue of compensation, I would like to state that we have yet to hear about any Lebanese willingness to compensate Israel and its citizens for the colossal damage caused by the terrorism emanating from Lebanese territory for over four decades. Israelis have also been killed, maimed and wounded and some have been kidnapped and are still missing. What about compensation for these victims and for the colossal economic burden upon Israel's citizens due to the need to defend themselves from the terrorism that is allowed free reign against us from Lebanese territory? In accordance with United Nations Security Council resolutions and international law, the Government of Lebanon is fully responsible for that terrorism.

Where there is good will and a willingness to cooperate, much good can be accomplished in the area of mine clearance. However, when these are absent, the result is a perpetuation of the threat to the well-being of innocent civilians.

The President: Another representative has requested the exercise of the right of reply.

Mr. Assaf (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to give some advice to the representative of Israel. He should read the General Assembly's rules of procedure which state that when exercising the right of reply, a delegation has to limit the scope of its statement. I did not mention every topic referred to by the representative of Israel. The representative of Israel should not have wasted the time of this Assembly by bringing up points I did not refer to at all.

I will respond solely to those points that were contained in my statement. First, the representative of Israel said a moment ago that Israel transferred to Lebanon all the mine maps. He said "all information regarding mines". If this is true, I wonder why the Security Council, and not Lebanon, in Security Council resolution 1496 (2003), required that the remaining maps be given to Lebanon. This was not only Lebanon's position; it was also the position of the United Nations and the Security Council. The Israeli representative's problem obviously is not with Lebanon, but is with the Security Council. As is customary, and as is the case with all United Nations organs and the Security Council, the representative of Israel should go to the Security Council and ask it why Israel was asked to hand over all the maps relating to mines in Lebanon. To confirm what I have just said, we have Security Council resolution 1496 (2003), where the Security Council confirmed the need to provide Lebanon and the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) with all the maps and documents relating to the location of the mines. That is what the Security Council said, not what Lebanon said.

Furthermore, the representative of Israel announced that he is prepared to cooperate on the question of mines. We hope that Israel would give us the remaining 20 per cent of the maps because without them it will take us seven years to eliminate all the mines. The representative of Israel said that Israel has provided assistance to Africa for mine removal. I would say that before going to Africa you should hand over the maps of the mines you have planted in Lebanon, to Lebanon.

In conformity with the principle of international responsibility and law, when a country commits certain acts, that country is responsible for such acts and should pay compensation for damages and losses incurred.

Finally, there is a proverb that says that if you have committed sins, then go hide. But instead of hiding, Israel announces arrogantly to the world that it is helping to remove mines in the Congo. Before going

to the Congo, Israel should try to remove the mines which it has buried in Lebanese territory.

Mr. Shacham (Israel): I will be brief. I would like to refer to the statement that I made in my first intervention in exercise of the right of reply regarding the question of the maps of the mines.

The information that we transferred included all information regarding mines and other explosive devices planted by other elements operating in the area, and those that we found it necessary to place in the area due to the terrorist activity emanating from Lebanon against Israel. I would also like to note that the question of the maps of the mines was not even mentioned in the most recent report of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon that covered the period up to July 2003.

Mr. Assaf (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): In addition to responding verbally, I would like to draw the attention of members to a document — not a Lebanese document, but a United Nations document. The Israeli representative has just said that the report of the Secretary-General did not touch upon this question. Earlier, I quoted from Security Council resolution 1496 (2003), and I will not repeat what I quoted. But I would like to draw the attention of members to the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, contained in document S/2003/728. The Israeli representative said that the Secretary-General did not touch upon this issue in that report. However, paragraph 11 of that report, which is a United Nations, not a Lebanese, report states:

> "The presence of a large number of minefields in the UNIFIL area of operation ... remained a matter of serious concern."

The representative of Israel should read the report before coming here to tell us that the Secretary-General did not touch upon this question.

Programme of work

The President: I should like to announce that at 10 a.m. on Thursday, 6 November 2003, there will be an informal consultation of the General Committee in the Economic and Social Council Chamber, open to all delegations on the subject of the New Partnership for Africa's Development, followed by the 4th meeting of the General Committee. Mr. Ibrahim Gambari, Under-Secretary-General and Special Adviser on Africa, will make a presentation.

I should also like to inform members that, at the request of the Francophone countries, consideration of agenda item 61, "Multilingualism", originally scheduled for the morning of Monday, 10 November 2003, is now postponed to March 2004. Representatives are requested to consult the *Journal of the United Nations* for the announcement of the time and date in March 2004.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.